



MEETINGS WITH “DECISION-MAKERS” 2007

**CCUBC Advocacy Meetings
October 31 and November 1st, 2007**

Prepared by:

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During the past 6 months two sessions with senior government officials have been organized. These involved 1.) The Canadian Society of Zoologists (CSZ) and 2.) The Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs (CCUBC). The following is a summary of the visits with Mr. Robert Best, Vice President (National Affairs) Association of Universities & Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Ms. Kim Houston A/Director Ecosystem Science, Fisheries & Oceans Canada, Dr. Eliot Phillipson, President, Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI), Mr. Jac van Beek, Vice President Programs, CFI, Dr. Clément Gauthier, Executive Director, Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC), Dr. Nigel Lloyd, Executive Vice-President, Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and other NSERC participants, Mr. Kevin Fitzgibbons, Executive Director, Office of the National Science Advisor, Mr. Donald Boucher, Policy Advisor, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Since the Government publication “Mobilizing Science and Technology” the mood across all departments and agencies visited seemed positive regarding the Conservatives’ new science strategy. The consistent message that emerged from each group with which CSZ met was that the most important approach is to clearly communicate to government (and particularly to elected officials) the value that Canada gets for its investment in science. Another suggestion was that the message would have greater resonance if it were to come from someone other than scientists (since scientists are often viewed as having a vested interest in increased funding for science). Letters to MPs from parents of undergraduate students or others that have been touched by science through direct benefits from research programs would be most powerful. CSZ commented that “the Knowledge Translation program, being negotiated with the Library of Parliament (LoP) and the Seminar Program with the LoP seem like good ideas to move things along on this front.”

*CFBS the Voice for Life Sciences in Canada ** FCSB la voix des sciences de la vie au Canada*

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Following the CSZ visits the CCUBC held its annual meeting in Ottawa and representatives met with Iain Stewart, Director General, Policy Branch, Industry Canada (IC), Feyrouz Kurji, Director Higher Education R & D Policy Directorate, IC, Dr. Suzanne Fortier President, Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and other NSERC representatives, Dr. Eliot Phillipson, President, Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and other CFI representatives, Mr. Guy Lauzon, M.P., Conservative Party, Mr. Richard Botham, Director Microeconomic Policy Analysis Division, Finance Canada (FC), and Ms. Elisha Ram, Chief, Industry and Knowledge Economy Section , FC. In these discussions the impression emerged that the Government was starting to take more seriously the need for investing in research and highly qualified personnel. In our visit to Industry Canada it was pointed out that of the 5000 Canada Graduate Scholarships (CGS) 1000 CGS were established over the past year. In addition there are now 4,800 scholarships awarded by the 3 Federal Granting Agencies. and another 2000 CGS have been announced. We were made aware that Training Grant competitions are being pushed by Industry Canada in Public Administration Internships.

In our conversation Industry Canada indicated their effort to focus on excellence and to push for excellence in key areas. The success rates in grant competitions at CIHR and NSERC were considered. Success rates at CIHR have traditionally been low and higher at NSERC. Currently, NSERC is undergoing a review to determine its current policy regarding success rates.

A continuing challenge for the Government is to encourage industry to invest more heavily in research. At the same time Industry Canada has through its initiatives provided \$ 105 million from the 2007-8 Federal Budget to fund 7 new Centres of Excellence that have potential to provide commercial spin-off.

The meeting with the Canadian Foundation for Innovation expressed satisfaction with the Government's 2007 budget. An allocation of \$510 million was announced. With the Government's National Strategy CFI consulted its community on the use of funds. CFI is satisfied that its focus should continue to be an emphasis on awards based on excellence and institutional priorities. CFI plans 4 new initiatives through its Operations Fund, Leading Edge Fund; National Platforms and Research Hospitals Fund. CFI will also recognize international programs in all its programs. Mention was also made of CFI's Knowledge Translation Program to encourage partnerships with the private sector also by support of research clusters.

The CCUBC Meeting with Dr. Susanne Fortier and Isabelle Blais was positive and NSERC appears pleased with Government support. NSERC will receive over \$1 billion this year.

A competition involving \$ 165 million will be available for distribution among the 3 Federal Granting Agencies. An opportunity is available for NSERC to receive ~\$ 60 million for targeted areas. Money would be available for operating facilities. NSERC is

looking for proposals. On an ongoing basis another \$ 30 million/year will be available in following three years. The targeted groups would be like NCEs with support for research, facilities and translation of knowledge into products. NSERC is working with CIHR and SSHRC to devise programs to improve students' skills in entrepreneurship.

A note of concern was voiced with regard the number of students in science and engineering in Canada's Graduate School Programs. Canada currently stands at 20th place among the OECD nations. NSERC is looking at training grants in some areas. In order to attract students, given the global competition for highly qualified personnel, stipends will have to be competitive. The CGS have been a great help but current NSERC stipends at \$ 21, 000 are not competitive.

Increased support for The Discovery Grants Program is current under review. The "high success rate policy" is being examined to determine whether it should be retained before a change in financial allocation is initiated. NSERC is considering how support for "big science" should be handled and is conferring with the Canadian Academies of Science.

A meeting with Guy Lauzon, MP was informative. In discussions we made reference to the Knowledge Translation Program that we have been discussing with the LOP in an attempt to be a service to Parliamentarians. He indicated that good point of contact would be the various House and/or Senate Committees. The agenda of each of these committees would be useful in identifying topics that are related to areas of science on which CFBS could provide useful information.

In all 11 visits occurred with decision-makers. The overall impression of individuals contacted regarding the Government's attitude to science was positive. A major concern for the Government continues to be the lack of research investment by private corporations. We concur that to obtain increased productivity it is imperative that this situation improve. We also noted the efforts to take advantage of moving new research ideas to the market place. CFBS is sympathetic to the Government's aim. Our main caution is that a healthy balance is maintained in the financial support of the basic and applied areas. With regard for the need for highly qualified individuals a helpful sign is the increase in the Government's budget from \$ 700 million to \$ 800 million in the share of CST funding devoted to post secondary education to bring the total to \$ 3.2 billion. In subsequent years the rate of increase will be 3%/year. Given the need for highly qualified people and the current financial condition of Canada's universities we remained concerned and hope that the rate of increase can be accelerated.